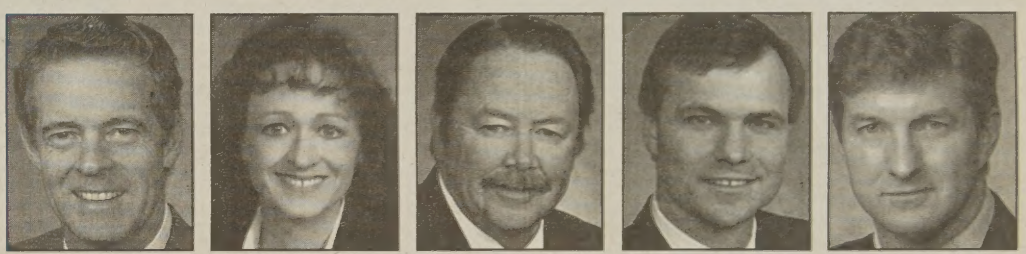
Freedom Watch™

Citizens Project

Colo. GOP to introduce vouchers & Ten Commandments legislation



Five Colorado legislators challenge the First Amendment. From left to right: John Andrews, Lauri Clapp, Jim Congrove, Shawn Mitchell, Mark Paschall.

by Richard Conway

Five Colorado lawmakers plan to introduce two bills in the state's upcoming legislative session that they say are in response to the "danger and decline of public education" and the "violent attack on Columbine High School." Republican State Senators John Andrews and Jim Congrove, and Republican State Representatives Lauri Clapp, Shawn Mitchell, and Mark Paschall claim their "Colorado Agenda" will result in "safer kids and safer schools." Their proposals, however, for school vouchers and the mandatory display of the Ten Commandments in classrooms, will undermine public schools, violate the Constitution, and devalue respect for religious diversity.

The five GOP legislators' agenda is comprised of two separate bills. The first, the School Guarantee Act, is another attempt to bring vouchers to Colorado and use public money to subsidize private schools – something Colorado voters have turned down overwhelmingly two times now. The proposed bill would establish a private school voucher program for those who claim schools are not providing "a learning environment fully conducive to the student's academic progress, moral development and physical safety." The bill fails to mention that parents already have the choice to send their child to any public school in the state if they are not satisfied with their current school. While "guaranteeing" educational quality is admirable, vouchers do not invest in public education nor make this goal a reality. Instead, vouchers reduce much-needed funding for public education by subsidizing those who can afford to send their children to private schools.

The School Guarantee Act will ultimately abandon American children and teachers who rely on our public system for their education and employment. It will also discriminate against those who live in rural areas where private schools are not available, those with special needs which private schools cannot accommodate, those who do not have transportation to private schools, and those who cannot afford that part of private school tuition not covered by the voucher. Also, since seventy-three percent of Colorado's private schools have some type of religious affiliation, the School Guarantee Act would support sectarian religious education with public funds – a violation of the First Amendment.

> ***"There are at least three different versions of the Ten Commandments: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. So displaying only one clearly shows government preference for one tradition over others."***
>
> *–Barry Lynn*
> Americans United

The second bill, The School Heritage Act, would require that the Ten Commandments be posted in all public classrooms and school entrances. This bill is an extension of the Family Research Council's (FRC's) "Hang Ten" campaign, designed by the religious right to encourage public officials to post the Ten Commandments in "the public square" including public schools and courthouses.

The United States Supreme Court ruled in 1980 that posting the Ten Commandments in public schools is an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion. However, the FRC is trying to create a loophole in the high court's ruling by underscoring the "heritage" of the Ten Commandments, citing its "importance to the American founding" and its role as a "treasure of world civilization." In response, People for the American Way, a national progressive

'Legislation' continued on page 2

THIS MONTH

- Racial Profiling pg 3
- Book Review of *Duck Egg Blue* pg 2
- Students shape School Board Candidates Debate pg 2
- Newsbriefs pg 3
- CP in the news pg 4

INSIDE CP

Become a Citizens Project member in our annual December membership drive. Information on page 4.

Citizens Project

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Legislation

from page 1

group, sent framed copies of the First Amendment to all 41 members of the United States Congress who support the FRC's campaign.

Aside from blatantly violating the Constitution, mandating that public schools and courts post the Ten Commandments also mandates disrespect for religious pluralism. The Ten Commandments are not a secular moral code on which everyone can agree. In fact, four of the Ten Commandment are specifically religious in nature. And as Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State noted, "There are at least three different versions of the Ten Commandments: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. So displaying only one clearly shows government preference for one tradition over others."

The School Guarantee Act is another attempt to bring vouchers to Colorado and use public money to subsidize private schools–something Colorado voters have turned down overwhelmingly two times now.

America is a religiously diverse society with over 2,000 different religions, traditions, denominations, and sects. If school and government officials display the Ten Commandments, will they also post the Five Pillars of Islam, the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, the Wiccan Rede, and/or the Affirmations of Humanism? Indeed, there would be more equity in that action, but the purpose of The School Heritage Act is not to promote religious education or diversity, but rather to force one group's religious belief onto others.

The School Guarantee Act and The School Heritage Act do not provide any intelligent solutions for improving the quality of education or the safety of children in public schools. Instead, the GOP's proposed Colorado Agenda offers a select few the opportunity to turn their backs on the issues at hand while, at the same time, asking for government endorsement of a "magic charm" that they believe will make all of society's problems vanish overnight. The pending introduction of these two bills underscores simplistic thinking at its worst and distracts the majority of the population from solving some very difficult social problems.

Duck Egg Blue

by Derrick Neill
Prometheus Books. **$24.95**
Available at Chinook Bookstore and elsewhere.

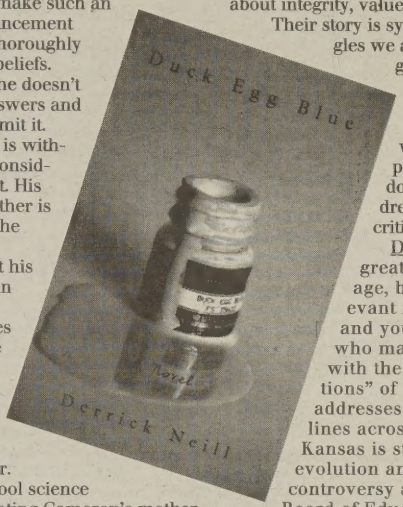
A book review by Bob Wiley

In his early years as a teacher in California, author Derrick Neill stood by as the Vista, California school board adopted a policy that afforded the biblical story of creation equal footing with evolution in science curricula. Later, as a middle school science teacher and scout leader in Sierra Vista, Arizona, he ignored religious-right efforts to drain funds from public education to subsidize religious education through a voucher system. He stood by as fundamentalists attacked health education, a well as gays and lesbians. He stood by as the legislature imposed a "moment of silence" that had been deemed unconstitutional in Alabama.

It was only when fundamentalists tried to ban a science-fiction novel authored by Neill that he joined the cry against censorship and government-backed religion. Duck Egg Blue is Neill's response to those who wish to suppress intellectual knowledge and to ban books in conflict with ultraconservative views.

Cameron Wright, the story's hero, is a high school freshman who finds that duck egg blue is the perfect color for river water in the Grand Canyon model he is making for a science-class evolution project. His father, a strict creationist, believes none of the science upon which evolution is based and tells Cameron that the model is all wrong since it does not agree with the creation story of Genesis in the Bible.

In his interview with the Scouting board for a well-deserved Eagle Scout badge, the board asks about his belief in God. Cameron candidly admits he is unsure at this point. He has not solidified his own religious views and does not want to make such an important pronouncement until he is more thoroughly convinced of his beliefs. Cameron knows he doesn't have all of the answers and is not afraid to admit it. Cameron's badge is withheld until he "reconsiders" his viewpoint. His fundamentalist father is involved behind the scene to pressure Cameron to reject his mother's Unitarian religious views. Cameron struggles to find the middle ground that maintains a loving, respectful relationship with each parent.



Meanwhile, Mr. Edwards, the school science teacher, who is dating Cameron's mother, comes under pressure by the Christian Coalition to restrict health education and teach the biblical creation story as part of the science curriculum. Mr. Edwards feels this is an affront to his professional standards as a science teacher, and a direct attack on the separation of church and state.

As the year unfolds, Cameron and Mr. Edwards each struggle in their search for answers to their individual dilemmas. In the end both learn important lessons about integrity, values, and courage.

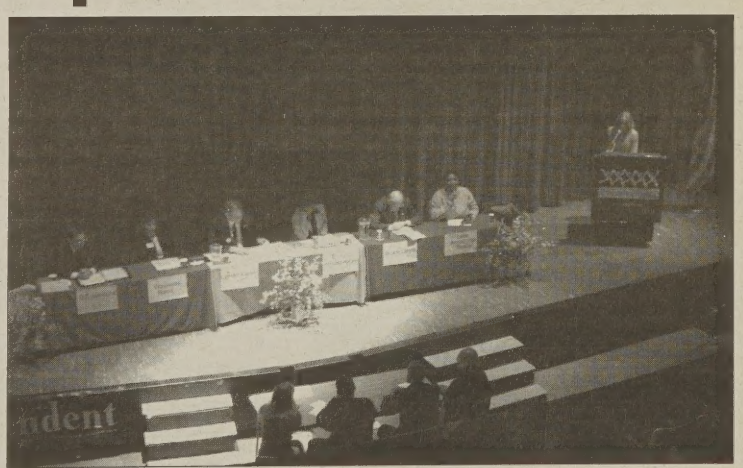
Their story is symbolic of the struggles we all face in our religiously diverse society. How do we resolve conflicts between differing worldviews in the pubic schools? How do we help our children develop and apply critical thinking skills? Duck Egg Blue is great reading for any age, but particularly relevant for high school and young adult readers who may be grappling with the "ultimate questions" of life. The themes it addresses remain in headlines across the country as Kansas is still dealing with its evolution and creationism controversy and our own State Board of Education appears to be following in Kansas' footsteps. A recent full page ad in the *Denver Post* pushes for the teaching of creationism in the science curriculum. As this novel argues, we must learn to recognize and counter attempts to impede sound scientific programs in public schools.

Students shape debate at forum

by Greg Borom

At Citizens Project's District 11 and 2 school board candidate forums, candidates faced some tough questions from seasoned veterans of public educational policy: high school students. Students from Coronado High School (District 11) and Sierra High School (District 2) drilled candidates at the beginning of each forum on issues such as class size, early high school start times, district financing of football vs. other extra-curricular activities, and treatment of non-academic student clubs such as Christian groups and gay/straight alliance groups.

The participation of Coronado students was part of a larger partnership between Citizens Project and Coronado social studies teachers to engage students in the school board elections. Coronado teachers and students cooperated to survey the student body on the most pressing problems facing their school. The top five issues generated from the students shaped the questions for the Coronado student's school board candidate survey. Citizens Project distributed the candidates' responses to the student survey at the District 11 forum and incorporated student concerns into our own candidate survey. Finally, Coronado students distributed the candidate responses throughout the high school and conducted a straw poll. The top four candidates from the Coronado poll (in order of votes won) were Waynette Rand, Lyman Kaiser, Bill Jambura, and Bruce Doyle.



Students pose questions to D-11 School Board Candidates at Citizens Project's Forum.
©Photo by Sean Cayton

Lauren Jordan, a junior at Coronado who attended the candidate forum, says she was excited to be involved in the school board race because "the school board deals with issues that are for my future and present education, which are very important"

Over twenty Coronado students attended the District 11 forum. This represented about a quarter of the total attendance. Sierra High School's student government provided six student volunteers at the District 2 forum; about fifty persons attended. Re-elected D-11 school board member Bruce Doyle thought student involvement was a great idea. "They showed an interest in their future and how schools can affect their future. I'd like to see them getting active in coming to school board meetings and expressing their opinions during citizens' comments." Doyle even supports having a student member on the D-11 board.

Citizens Project plans to build upon this experience by creating more opportunities for youth involvement and leadership around public-education issues.

Citizens Project

Racial Profiling

The unofficial offense of "Driving While Black" ***by Dan Ceaser***

Fueled by the admission of New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman that minority motorists were more likely than whites to be pulled over on the New Jersey Turnpike, police departments around the country have begun investigations into the question of racial profiling in determining routine traffic stops. This issue became the subject of debate locally this past summer, with the development of a Gang Task Force by the Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD).

"African American and Hispanic youths are over-represented among juveniles stopped by the police"

–Urban League report

In response to a series of gang-related incidents primarily in southeast Colorado Springs, an area of the city with a high minority population, the Gang Task Force engaged in an aggressive campaign of traffic stops, parole checks, and interviews to obtain information on gang activities. Critics of the program claimed that police stopped and searched a disproportionate number of minorities, and that the selection of those pulled over was based primarily on race. Jason Gauldin, director of the Hillside Neighborhood Association, addressed this issue in the September 4 edition of *The Gazette*, "We do want justice. But making far-reaching and dangerous generalizations (about a car's occupants) when making a traffic stop is not a logical or safe connection to draw."

In response to the accusation of racial profiling by the Gang Task Force, CSPD spokesperson Lt. Skip Arms told *The Gazette* that race was not a consideration when determining whom to question.

Due to budget and personnel constraints, the CSPD recently eliminated the Gang Task Force; however, department officials have expressed a willingness to re-institute the program if the need arises.

Studies reveal that the problem of racial profiling locally extends beyond the Gang Task Force activities. A September 1999 study by The Urban League of the Pikes Peak Region determined that "African American and Hispanic youths are over-represented among juveniles stopped by the police in 1995. That is, they are stopped more often than expected given the relative size of their local populations." According to the Urban League report, African Americans comprise 8 percent of the Colorado Springs population; however, 20.3 percent of juveniles stopped by police in 1995 were African American. According to the 1994 census estimate, 9.5 percent of the Colorado Springs population is Hispanic, yet 24 percent of juveniles stopped by the police in 1995 were Hispanic. (Similar statistics were not available for adults.)

An April, 1999 survey conducted for the City of Colorado Springs by an independent polling firm found that African American and Hispanic city residents are well aware of the disparity in treatment. According to the poll, which focused on public sentiment toward city services, 24 percent of Hispanics and 18 percent of African Americans polled felt local police did only a fair or poor job treating citizens with fairness and respect. People of color were twice as likely to see police treatment as unfair as the majority of the polling sample which was overwhelmingly white.

In trying to isolate the causes of this disparity, many point to the dramatic under-representation of minorities in local law enforcement. A recent article entitled "The Color of Law" published by *The Gazette*, points out that of the 521 officers in the CSPD, only 29 or 5.5 percent are African American and of the 305 deputies of the El Paso County Sheriff's Office, only 13 or 4.3 percent are Hispanic.

Racial profiling has recently become a subject of national scrutiny, with President Clinton calling for all federal law enforcement departments to begin internal investigations into racial inequity in police procedures. Under pressure from local citizens' groups and the American Civil Liberties Union, Los Angeles County recently adopted a measure that calls for local law enforcement to report the cost and feasibility of monitoring the racial breakdown of those stopped for traffic infractions.

Similar measures have been taken by police departments across the country. Recently in Howard County, Maryland, the Chief of Police and a collection of his top lieutenants publicly met with civic leaders in order to address complaints by many in the community that DWB – "Driving While Black" – is a basis for being stopped by the police. As a result of this public discourse, it was decided that by year's end, Howard County will have a system in place to monitor traffic stops by race, in order to determine whether or not racial profiling is occurring in their community.

The ACLU secured a victory against racial profiling in Colorado recently when they won a class action suit against police in Eagle, Colorado. The court found that the plaintiffs were stopped by law enforcement officers simply because of their race and/or ethnicity, while they were driving on I-70 in Eagle. The lawsuit resulted in a plaintiffs' recovery fund slightly exceeding $500,000 which will be distributed to programs providing education and/or training for police concerning 4th Amendment search and seizure issues. This ruling sends a clear message not only that race-based traffic stops are a reality, but that such stops are unconstitutional and punishable by law.

"We do want justice. But making far-reaching and dangerous generalizations (about a car's occupants) when making a traffic stop is not a logical or safe connection to draw."

–Jason Gauldin,
Director of the
Hillside Neighborhood Association

Newsbriefs

White supremacist flyers blanket Springs

During the first week of October approximately 2,500 flyers, touting racist propaganda, were found stapled to telephone poles throughout Colorado Springs. The flyers were also illegally inserted into the *Independent* at several Colorado Springs businesses.

Under the bold headline "Missing: A Future for White Children in America" was the photograph of a blue-eyed, blond, pigtailed girl. Other flyers, accompanied by anti-Clinton propaganda, were printed with the message "Clinton Believes an America Without a White Majority is a Worthy Destiny."

A local man, who identifies himself as Robert Miles, claims responsibility for the flyers. Although he is a strong supporter of The National Alliance, a West Virginia-based white supremacist group, it appears that he distributed the flyers (available on the Internet) on his own rather than through an organized effort by The National Alliance.

In response, Citizens Project reported the incident to the Anti-Defamation League, Hillside Neighborhood Association (where some flyers were found), Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Colorado Springs Police Department. Citizens Project compiled a summary of the beliefs and history of The National Alliance and included this in the reports. Citizens Project also provided background material for the *Independent's* article on the incident.

MISSING
A Future for White Children in America
Description: Blond or brown hair, fair skin; innocent, inquisitive, intelligent; trusting personality. Her future has been abducted by corrupt politicians and minority special-interest groups. There will be no future for her in the Third World America our nation's enemies are planning. Let's take back our country, and make it great, clean, decent, and beautiful once again—for our children's sake. The men and women of the National Alliance want you to join us in this great patriotic effort.

Bircham distributes newsletter attacking Citizens Project, others

Local radio talk show host and anti-gay activist Mike McKee has launched a newsletter supported by and distributed at Bircham's Office Products. "The Real News" focuses on the "threat of the gay agenda," claiming that

'Newsbriefs' continued on page 4

Quote of Note

"Civility: The sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together."

–Stephen L. Carter
Civility - Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy

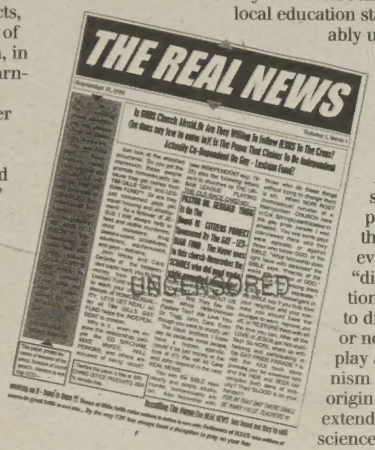
Citizens Project

'Newbriefs' continued from page 3

organizations from the Children's Museum to the Urban League are promoting homosexuality.

The first issue, published in August, is a compilation of articles from local papers which McKee believes prove his gay conspiracy theory.

The second issue of "The Real News" hit the counters of Bircham's Office Products, located at the corner of Fillmore and Nevada, in late September. A warning to pastors that a "real News" volunteer will contact them to sign "The Pledge" appears in the second edition. "The Pledge" asks if pastors confirm that "the entire Bible is God's Word," and "adultery, drunkenness, fornication, Homosexuality, idolatry, killing, lust, stealing, etc. is a sin." [sic] McKee urges pastors to post "THE PLEDGE" in their church and promises to list pastors who sign the pledge and those who do not in the next issue.



Also included is support for a campaign to recall Mayor Makepeace and on the front page: "Pastor Gerrald Trigg is on the board of CITIZENS PROJECT sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Fund. The Mayor goes to this church [First United Methodist, Rev. Trigg]." Perhaps you can follow McKee's logic better than us ...

Sponsors of the newsletter, in addition to Bircham, include Shogun Express, a fast food restaurant on South Nevada and OEM Parts, a used computer parts store.

Darwin, we're not in Kansas anymore . . .

In a unanimous decision, the Fort Collins, Colorado school board has determined that a district charter school, the Liberty Common School, violated state and local education standards and is "probably unconstitutional" in their decision to exclude evolution from science classes. According to an article in the October 27 *Denver Post*, the charter school approved a policy which restricted the teaching of human evolution and stated "discussions of evolutionary theory can lead to discussions of whether or not supernatural forces play a role in the mechanism of evolution or the origin of life. These topics extend beyond the scope of science and will not be taught at Liberty Common School."

After complaints from parents that the science curriculum at the school was being adversely affected, the Fort Collins school board made an inquiry, rebuked Liberty Common School officials for violating the standards of its contract with the district, and demanded that the policy either be repealed or rewritten to include basic educational standards. As member of the Fort Collins board Bob Bacon stated, "We're not in Kansas."

INSIDE CP

CP in the news

Citizens Project was quoted in *The Gazette* regarding the Christian Coalition's fundraising letter threatening to push an anti-gay city ordinance in November 2000. KKTV, Channel 11 also interviewed CP Director Megan Day about the Christian Coalition letter.

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The Independent ran an article highlighting student involvement in the District 11 School Board election through Citizens Project's pilot student-organizing project. *The Gazette* also covered the student concerns and their involvement in Citizens Project's District 11 School Board Candidate Forum. *The Gazette* ran a follow-up story on student involvement in the school Board races and the results of the straw poll at Coronado High School – which came about through the Citizens Project pilot project.

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Citizens Project's school board candidate survey results were posted on *The Gazette's* website as a supplement to their voter guide. Due to a pagination error in the *Independent*, Citizens Project's survey results for districts 2, 11, and 12 were reprinted in the October 28 issue.

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Assistant Director, Greg Borom was quoted over the summer in *The Gazette* on the push to post the Ten Commandments in schools and later on the IRS's decision to deny the Christian Coalition tax-exempt status.

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Citizens Project was included in Western Justice Center Foundation's online database of groups that provide intergroup dialogue and community-based mediation.

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Denver's weekly newspaper, *Westword* used the CP library and interviews with CP staff for an article on the declining influence of Colorado for Family Values.

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And finally, *The Gazette* published Director Megan Day's letter to the editor regarding school sponsored prayer. It was published over the Thanksgiving holiday.

You can make a difference
JOIN CITIZENS PROJECT

Your voice for tolerance in the Pikes Peak region.

Citizens Project ...

- Reports on news and views in *Freedom Watch*
- Organizes campaigns, workshops, and events
- Sponsors candidate surveys and forums
- Monitors and informs on legislative and other issues

... and more

❑ Yes, I'd like to join Citizens Project! Enclosed is my membership contribution of $25 or more.
(All new member contributions and donations of $250 or more will be matched by the Gay & Lesbian Fund for Colorado)

❑ I'm already a member, but I'm ready to do more! Enclosed is my contribution of:

❑ $25 ❑ $50 ❑ $75 ❑ $120 ❑ Other: $_____

(All members receive a postage-paid subscription to Freedom Watch.*)*

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Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state.

Citizens Project

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